

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 6463

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, PDEV, PINT, LE
SUBJECT: PARTITION OF LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 2707

1. OUR ASSESSMENT IS THAT THE GOI DOES NOT RELISH THE PROSPECT OF THE PARTITION OF LEBANON AS SUGGESTED BY PARA TWO OF REFTEL. RATHER, ISRAELIS REGARD THE LEBANESE IMBROGLIO AS A VOLATILE SITUATION IN WHICH THEY AS WELL AS THE OTHER INVOLVED PARTIES MORE OFTEN REACT TO EVENTS THAN CONTROL THEM. PARTITION IS NOT AN END THE GOI SEEKS TO PRECIPITATE, BUT A POSSIBILITY IT MUST CONSIDER. THE ISRAELIS RECOGNIZE THAT THERE WOULD BE MORE TO THE BREAK-UP OF LEBANON THAN CONFUSION AMONG THE ARABS AND A CHANCE TO GRAB TERRITORY UP TO THE LITANI. THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE GOL WOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY RENEWED WARFARE BETWEEN MARONITES AND PALESTINIAN/LEBANESE LEFTISTS. THE STRUGGLE
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FOR PARTITION WOULD LIKELY CREATE A SITUATION IN WHICH THE SYRIAN ARMY AND IDF WOULD BE DRAWN INTO THE BATTLE IN PROTECTION OF THEIR INTERESTS AND ALLIES. MISCALCULATION ON EITHER SIDE COULD PRECIPITATE ANOTHER ARAB-ISRAELI WAR.

2. THE GOI WILL CONTINUE TO SQUEEZE MAXIMUM ADVANTAGE

FROM ANY SITUATION THAT EVOLVES IN LEBANON. IF THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT DISINTEGRATES AND WIDE-SPREAD HOSTILITIES ARE RESUMED, THE GOI WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY PROVIDE SUBSTANTIAL ASSISTANCE OT THE MARONITES IN THIER EFFORT TO INCREASE THE TERRITORY UNDER THEIT CONTROL AND ESTABLISH A COMMON BORDER WITH ISRAEL. THE ISRAELIS WOULD PREFER TO RELY UPON MATERIAL AND DIPLOMATIC ASSISTANCE IN SUPPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN CAUSE AND AVOID FURTHER ENTANGLING THE IDF IN LEBANON. HOWEVER, THIS IS CLEARLY CONTINGENT UPON HOW WELL THE MARONITES DO AND THE ROLE THE SYRIAN PLAY. IN ANY CASE, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THE ISRAELIS ARE INTERESTED IN "EXPANSIONISM" PURELY FOR THE SAKE OF LEBANESE REAL ESTATE; IF THERE IS ANOTHER MOVE NORTH IT WOULD BE DIRECTLY RELATED TO ISRAELI SECURITY.

3. WE AGREE THAT FRAGMENTATION OF LEBANON WOULD HURT U.S. INTERESTS AND SET BACK THE PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN THE REGION. UNFORTUNATELY, IT IS HARD TO SEE WHAT THE USG CAN DO TO INFLUENCE THE SITUATION THAT IT IS NOT ALREADY DOING. SUCH LEBANESE PROBLEMS AS THE WEAKNESS OF THE GOL, THE PALESTINIAN ARMED PRESENCE, SECTARIAN CLEAVAGES AND EXTERNAL INVOLVEMENT DO NOT APPEAR TO BE RESOLVABLE IN THE NEAR TERM NOR SUSCEPTIBLE TO OUR INFLUENCE.
LEWIS

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